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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000149

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR(DICARLO), EUR/SCE(HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR  
BRAUN; OSD FOR BEIN

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TAGS: [BK](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - THE RS AND KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE; EXPECT  
RHETORICAL FIREWORKS (AT LEAST)

REF: A. 07 SARAJEVO 2316

[1](#)B. 07 SARAJEVO 292

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. English. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Bosnian Serbs are following developments in Kosovo closely and see Kosovo as an integral part of both Serbia and their own national identity. Many also believe that if Kosovo Albanians have the right to become independent, the Republika Srpska (RS) should also have the same right, a sentiment that is likely to grow once Kosovo declares its independence. The RS government has made clear it will oppose any unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovar Albanians and will not accept a near-term recognition by Bosnia of an independent Kosovo. RS government leaders, including RS PM Milorad Dodik, have told us privately they will not tolerate unrest resulting from Kosovo independence, and we do not expect any significant violence in the wake of an independence declaration. Nonetheless, public rhetoric from the RS, particularly comments by Dodik, has served to inflame, rather than moderate RS public opinion in the past. For more than a year, Dodik has implied direct linkages between Kosovo independence and the status of the RS. Given this track record, we should anticipate similar statements, perhaps impulsive, perhaps deliberate, from Dodik after Kosovo declares independence. These comments could fuel Bosnian Serb sentiment for RS independence. END SUMMARY

Kosovo in the RS  
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[1](#)2. (C) Bosnian Serbs in the RS are following events in Kosovo closely. Media outlets feature daily reports about Kosovo, with a particular emphasis on the alleged suffering of Kosovar Serbs (Ref A). Although most have never been to Kosovo, Bosnian Serbs view Kosovo as the cradle of Serb history, culture and national identity. Many also have highly negative views of Kosovar Albanians. There is little consideration in RS public discourse of the historical developments that contributed to the Kosovo status question. Few Bosnian Serbs are willing to acknowledge the consequences of Milosevic regime policies in Kosovo, and when they do, they often characterize them as a legitimate response to what they believe was Kosovo Albanian "terrorism."

Kosovo Independence As Precedent  
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[1](#)3. (C) Still, Bosnian Serbs focus more on Kosovo's

independence as a potential precedent for the RS than they do on independence's implications for their cultural, historic and national identity. Most Bosnian Serbs tell us that if Kosovar Albanians have the right to become independent from Serbia, then the RS should be able to declare independence from Bosnia. Political commentators critical of U.S. support for Kosovo independence often accuse the international community of maintaining double-standards -- allowing independence to the Albanians but denying it to the RS. Some political commentators have even gone so far as to publicly claim that the RS should be allowed to proclaim independence if Kosovo declares independence.

#### Dodik Burns The Kosovo Candle At Both Ends

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¶4. (C) Though RS politicians have long condemned all calls for an independent Kosovo, senior RS and Bosnian Serb officials, including RS PM Dodik, Bosnian Serb member of the Tri-Presidency Radmanovic, and Chairman of the Council of Ministers Spiric, have privately assured us that they will take a "constructive approach" on Kosovo. They have also pledged to refrain from making it a domestic political issue.

Dodik told us privately on several occasions that although he cannot support Kosovo's independence, he will preserve peace and stability in the RS. He has also signaled publicly that he would not tolerate a violent response within the RS to a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo.

¶5. (C) Dodik's public rhetoric on Kosovo has not always matched his private assurances to us and senior USG officials, however (e.g., Dodik's December 4, 2007 commitment to A/S Fried to publicly encourage Kosovar Serbs to stay in Kosovo was followed by public comments suggesting that

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partition was the best solution for Kosovo). Though Dodik has never directly linked RS independence to Kosovo independence, for more than a year, he has regularly implied such a connection. It required a clear, stern warning from the U.S. for Dodik to end a spate of unconstructive comments at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007 (Ref B). Comments by Dodik linking the RS and Kosovo resumed in August 2007, and during the height of the political crisis over the HighRep's October 19 measures, Dodik implied several times that it would be hard to explain why Kosovo independence was not a precedent for the RS.

#### Warning: Do Not Make Us Recognize Kosovo

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¶6. (C) Other Bosnian Serb officials, including Radmanovic and Spiric, have been more responsible than Dodik in their public comments about Kosovo. They and other Bosnian Serb officials, have warned publicly and privately that the RS would never recognize a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo. They have also repeatedly urged international community representatives not to push Bosnia to recognize Kosovo. Our understanding is that such a decision would have to be taken by the Tri-Presidency; something Radmanovic would certainly oppose. If the other members of the Presidency chose to force the issue by "outvoting" him, Radmanovic would probably invoke RS vital national interests and send the issue to the RS National Assembly where the decision could be vetoed.

#### Violence Unlikely

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¶7. (C) Although most Bosnian Serbs are often passionate about Kosovo, this does not mean large numbers would mobilize to oppose independence, either by going to Kosovo or engaging in violent protests in the RS. The RS electorate, like much of the Bosnian electorate, is generally apathetic, and more focused on issues of immediate impact to their daily lives, such as increasing prices. Nonetheless, Kosovo's

independence will likely be accompanied by smaller scale rallies, led by "patriotic" organizations and NGOs in the RS, along with a media frenzy of special programs and round tables. There will also certainly be a continuation of ongoing humanitarian aid collections for Kosovo Serbs. Any violence against Kosovo Serbs associated with an independence declaration would elicit a proportionally stronger reaction in the RS.

Comment

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18. (C) The scale of the public response in the RS will depend to a large degree on Dodik. We believe he is sincere in wishing to avoid violent reactions within the RS to Kosovo independence, but he certainly has the power and popularity to stoke a nationalist response for his own political purposes. He may decide to downplay the issue rhetorically, but we cannot be certain. Dodik is often impulsive, and even if his aim is not to fan the flames of nationalism, his propensity to shoot from the hip may lead to this outcome. Dodik might also seek to deliberately ratchet up political tensions over Kosovo in order to intimidate the HighRep and international community into acquiescing on other elements of his agenda. Of course, Dodik may not yet have decided how "to play Kosovo." Dodik the tactician is fundamentally a populist. He has a poor track record of resisting popular demands and a well established history of stoking public opinion, which he then uses to justify his own political positions. In the context of Kosovo and in an RS where Bosnian Serbs would prefer, if given the choice, a future outside Bosnia, this is potentially dangerous.

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